9: Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1942
ER6 Rural Irish ER6

another heritage of the Mesolithic. Research will probably 172
show that many details of material culture as well as a substantial element in the racial composition of the Irish people derive from the Mesolithic background, which has been termed " the main vital period in the setting out of the human map of Europe."

Left to themselves, however, it is unlikely that these fisherfolk, specialized as they were in the arts and crafts of food-gathering, would have advanced to the full status of civilisation. If our eyes were fixed on Ireland alone we should be unable to account for the origin of Irish agriculture and stock-raising, for the crops and animals that came to be used are not found in the native flora and fauna. It was from distant western Asia, by way of the seas and islands of the Mediterranean and the western peninsulas of Europe that the new ideas found their way to Ireland. And although the food-gatherers and fisherfolk had blazed the trail, it was a revolution in food production that now brought with it the elements of true civilisation. To it the term Neolithic (new stone) Revolution is applied.

501

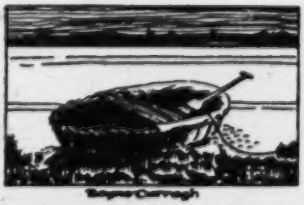

Fig. 4.

9: Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1942
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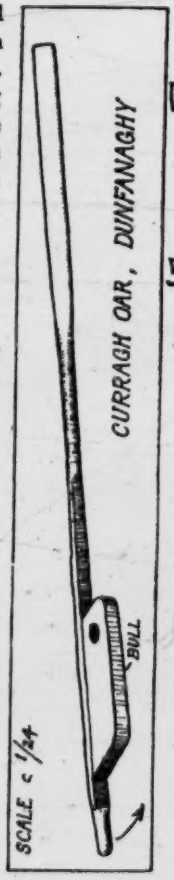
netting in sea and lake and for poaching. And in this connexion one may whisper that the illegal eel-spear (Fig. 94), the leister or salmon spear, and the trout net (Fig. 96)[1] will sometimes be shown to the discreet inquirer. Old garden forks and shovels are often fashioned into spears by the smith. Resinous bog-fir sometimes provided the torches for "burning the river" in salmon-poaching. Much might be said of these dark practices, but this is not the place to give away all the secrets of the countryside. We may properly refer to the huge "legitimate" catches of eels in weirs such as those of "the fishy fruitful Bann."

The well-known curraghs of the Boyne and the west coast have recently been described in James Hornell's book, "British Coracles and Irish Curraghs," but details of rowing and sailing craft of all kinds should be recorded and sketched before regional types give way, as they are slowly doing, to standardised boats. It is probably not too much to say that every coastal county, every large river and lake, has its own traditional styles of vessels, and their comparative study would be an important contribution to science. Some of the small oval curraghs of the Boyne are still covered with cow-hide, but tarred canvas has taken its place in the larger sea-going curraghs of the west coast. These display many interesting variations according to local conditions and custom, but all, with the exception of the paddle curraghs of Tory Island, are fitted with single thole pins on which the oars swivel, the wooden pin passing through a hole in the heavy "bool" of the oar (Fig. 99). This curious device is employed also on some river and lake boats (e.g., the Corrib, the Shannon and Lough Neagh) and was until recent years found on the fishing boats of the Scotch Quarter at Carrickfergus, Co. Antrim. I have no information on the distribution of the single thole-pin oar outside Ireland, except that Mr. Hornell has reported (in a letter) that the method is used in the Sudan on the Nile. It is true of such ethnographical studies

[TEXT CONTINUES TOP OF P. 150 -- ANALYST]

[1] Similar poaching nets were made in the Hebrides—and probably also in Ireland—of heather stems and even sedge roots (*Carex flacca*).



[416]

501

Fig. 99.

[824]

9: Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1942
ER6 Rural Irish ER6
Donegal

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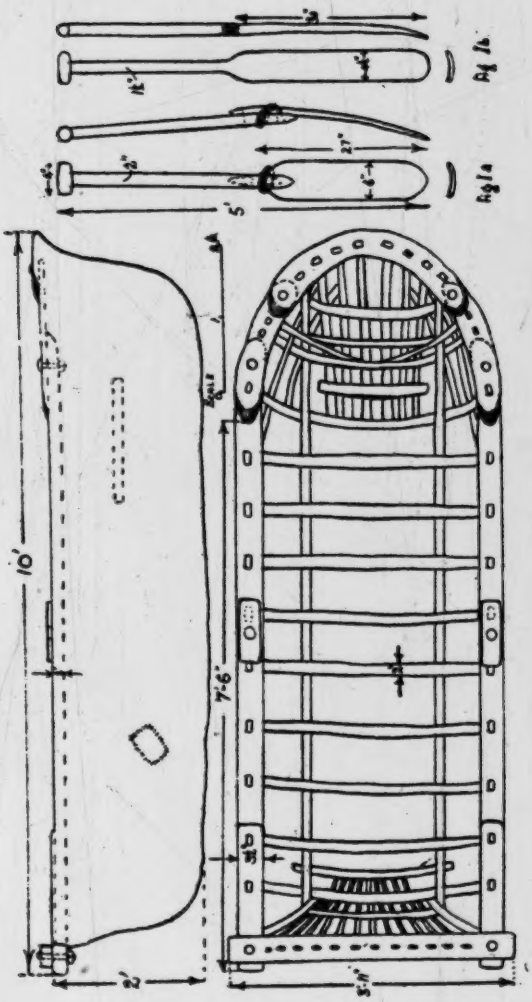

Fig. 97.
The Bunbeg paddle-curragh, Co. Donegal, with types of paddles, old and new.

[p. 148]

9: Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1942
ER6 Rural Irish ER6
Donegal

501 •

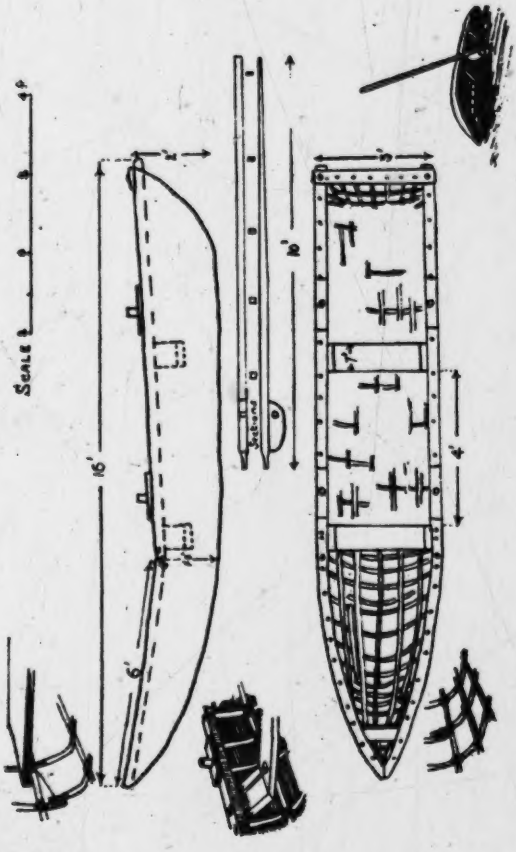

Fig. 98. The rowing curragh of Sheephaven, Co. Donegal.

[p. 149]

9: Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1942
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Fig. 100.
Total length 50"

as of other branches of the sciences of humanity that we know more of the ways of remote peoples of the world that we do of our own folk (Figs. 97 and 98, and Plate VI).

Before leaving the sea and coming back to shore, brief reference must be made to some other sea-creatures which have contributed to the economy of the coasts. There is the basking shark of the Aran Islands pursued in curraghs and captured with a harpoon of the type shown in Figure 100. Seals, despite the many superstitions attaching to them, have been hunted for their skins; according to an old account the skins were made into covers for the oval curraghs of the Rosses in Donegal. It is recorded that seal-catchers in Co. Cork wore on their arms "bags quilted with charcoal." The seals when they bite are said to let go the hold when they hear the crunch of the charcoal.

Shore-collecting plays a varied if nowadays greatly reduced part in the life of coastal communities. The great days of kelp-burning, when the strong dense smoke drifted far inland, are no more, but this once flourishing industry has left its traces in half-ruined kelp-kilns (Fig. 101) and in various rusting hooks and drags (102, 103) which betray the keen rivalry shown in gathering the crop. The best weeds (tangle or "fyams," that is, *Laminaria*) were cut in deep water and their value was enhanced if they were free of sand. The men would sometimes have their knives and sickles fitted with handles as much as twenty feet long: women and children with back creels, assisted by donkeys or ponies with side-creels, did the carrying. In Aran the creel women protect their backs from the damp seaweed by wearing a goatskin.

Kelp Kilns
Fig. 101.

Carting or "drawing" the wrack for manuring the fields is still an active industry in spring on most Irish shores. The wrack is often carried some miles inland, and there are many stories of the contraband goods once smuggled from the coast under cover of loads of piled wrack. In Carlingford Lough, where the tides run high, wide stretches of foreshore are "planted" with rows of boulders in orderly fields called "plans." The bladderwrack which grows on the stones is

10: Browne D-5 (1893) 1894
ER6 Rural Irish ER6
Inishbofin

but a few years ago the ordinary means of lighting the houses was a rude open lamp, filled with oil extracted from the livers of fish, and having a piece of peeled rush for a wick. 373

Kelp-burning was formerly one of the industries of the islands, but of late years it declined rapidly, and is now practically extinct. As to the cause of this decay of a formerly profitable source of income, very different accounts are given, some alleging the poor quality of the weed; others that they were not fairly treated in selling; and others again that it does not pay as well as the fish-curing. 381

The fish most taken are sea-bream, glassan (a sort of pollock), mackerel, turbot, and plaice, used mostly for home consumption; cod and ling, which are cured at the fish-curing station for exportation, and oil extracted from their livers; also large quantities of crabs and lobsters, which are taken to Ballyvaughan, Co. Clare, from which they are forwarded to the English market. The boat used for conveying them is of peculiar construction, and has a large salt-water tank amidships, in which the lobsters are kept alive. The lobster-pots are of the usual type. There is nothing unusual about their ordinary method of fishing, except that the Inishbofin men, as mentioned in a footnote to the account of that island in the Memoir of the Geological Survey, already alluded to, do not follow the shoals of fish around the western headland, but carry their boats across the narrow isthmus in which Lough Bofin is situated. 226 439 [501] [502]

The pursuit of the "sun-fish," or basking-shark (*Selache maxima*), was formerly a source of considerable profit to the islanders, but has been almost altogether abandoned of late years owing to the decline in the price of the oil, and partly, it is said, to the loss of several lives on one occasion when a boat was charged and overturned by a wounded fish, also to the partial disappearance for some years of the sharks. 226

The season for this enterprise is from April until the end of June, and in that time large numbers of these fish were taken formerly, and some are still killed from time to time. Mr. G. H. Kinahan, to whom I am indebted for several notes relative to the condition of the islands some years ago, says:—"The sun-fish fishing was considerable in my time (1870). I have seen strings of seven and nine fish; when caught, they towed them into the harbour, cut out the liver, and left the carcass to rot, or be eaten by the pigs; the stench in the harbour was something to remember." A very full description of the fishing is given by Sir H. W. Gore-Booth in a recent article. He states that the value of the oil (from eight to twelve petroleum barrels full) obtained from the liver of one of these fish has been variously estimated

10: Browne D-5 (1893) 1894
ER6 Rural Irish ER6
Inishbofin

226 to him by old fishermen at from £30 to £100, so that the loss of this industry must have told considerably on a poor community such as this. The primitive method which he found in use on his visit to the islands he describes in full as it was explained by Michael Halloran, the 'king'[1] of Inishshark, a veteran harpooner, who had just killed his nineteenth fish a few days before.

"I had been told that these sun-fish generally took from sixteen to eighteen hours, and frequently longer, to kill; in fact, I have heard it sometimes took two days, so naturally felt considerable interest in the gear used for the purpose. The king brought with him his trusty harpoon, which, to my mind, looked a most antiquated arrangement, especially designed to cut out of a fish, instead of holding it. I could not see a whale-boat or anything like one, so inquired where the boat was, and was shown an ordinary square-sterned boat, about 16 feet in the keel, which had nailed on her starboard bow a piece of wood about 1 foot long, with three small notches, or scores, barely half an inch deep, cut in it. I found out that these notches or scores were all they had to run the line through, and that when a boat fastened a fish, it was a pulling match between our friend the shark on one hand, and sixteen men on the other, a regular case of 'pull devil, pull baker'! Such a thing as a bollard head to take a turn of the line round seems never to have entered their heads."

226 501

In addition to fishing and farming, the other occupations are fish-curing at the station recently established by the landlord, Cyril Allies, Esq., J.P., who resides on the island, and personally superintends it, and the trades, represented by a boat-builder, a blacksmith, a shoemaker who imports his leather from the mainland, a tailor, who still adheres to the old method of measuring his clients without a tape, using instead a sheet of paper, on which the several lengths are recorded by "snips," or notches cut with the scissors; there is one weaver who makes use of a rather archaic form of hand-loom, four men who, on occasion, act as sawyers, extemporising a saw-pit in the nearest convenient spot by the aid of trestles, and using to mark their lines a cord blackened with the ashes of straw or shavings, and finally, a fiddler.

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[622]

[1] In answer to an inquiry of mine relative to the position of king, Mr. Myles Joyce, National Teacher of Bofin, writes:—"The title of king is not hereditary in the island. There is at present a man removed something beyond his neighbours in the way of education and position, who is, *par excellence*, the king; and to whom all persons who want any information about the island or its history must apply."

10: Browne D-5 (1893) 1894
ER6 Rural Irish ER6
Inishbofin

stools, and a rough table or two, with a dresser containing a scanty assortment of coarse earthenware, a spinning-wheel, and a quilting-frame, constitute the furniture of the kitchen. In one corner is a pile of turf for fuel, on which the fowl roost, and above the couples are stored the dried fish, &c., for the winter's use, and the agricultural and piscatorial implements.

The domestic utensils consist of the usual large three-legged pot, slung on a crook over the fire, a griddle, a frying-pan, and, perhaps, a quern, a boran or sieve of sheepskin stretched over a wicker frame, and a couple of skids or shallow, circular wicker baskets. The furniture of the bedroom, or rooms, consists of a couple of tent beds; a few chairs and, perhaps, a small table. There is very rarely a loft to the house. At night the cattle, fowl, and pigs are taken into the kitchen, the pigs being accommodated in a pen beside the fire-place, while the cattle are fastened at the opposite side of the room.

6. *Transport.*—The roads are good, and extend over a large part of the islands, but are only used for foot traffic and cattle, as there are no wheeled vehicles of any description, and all goods are carried either in hampers slung on the back, the usual method of taking home potatoes, &c., or in two wicker panniers or cleaves, slung across the back of a pony or donkey, one or other of which is owned by nearly every family. The harness of these animals is home-made, and of primitive design, the panniers, manufactured from osiers grown on the islands, being slung from pegs on a wooden frame, beneath which, to protect the animal's back, is a thick straw mat saddle. Both sexes ride on the horses behind the panniers, and both adopt the same position, a sideways posture, the men not riding astride.

The method of taking home the harvest is picturesque; the ponies have cloths hung over their faces to prevent their eating the grain, and are then literally clothed with sheaves, which are hung all round them, and piled up so as to give them the appearance of walking straw stacks.

For water transport there are a good many boats of various descriptions, the primary use of which is for fishing; only one, the post-boat, which goes thrice a week to the mainland if the weather permits, being regularly used for transport.

The number and classification of the boats are, it is believed, given correctly below, but it was difficult to get any two accounts to agree.

There are five hookers, seven pookauns,[1] fifteen curraghs, one yawl, and about thirty rowing-boats.

[1] An undecked sailing-boat, cutter rigged.

10: Browne D-5 (1893) 1894
ER6 Rural Irish ER6
Inishbofin

Inishshark has about twelve boats of from one to two tons. The natives of this island do not approve of the curragh, for which their coast is too rocky. 501

The ordinary rowing boat is manned by five men, the curragh by three.

The curragh is of the ordinary west coast type, consisting of a light wooden frame covered with tarred canvas.

VI.—FOLK-LORE.

Of this interesting branch of the subject, I regret to be able to give but little information, as the people are chary of talking upon such matters to strangers, and only a local collector working for a considerable time could be expected to gather much. Thanks, however, to the kindness of the Rev. Edward Lavelle, his brother Mr. Michael Lavelle, Mr. Myles Joyce, the schoolmaster of the island, as well as to several of the boatmen and others, I am enabled to give the following few notes on the subject. The legendary lore of these islands, especially Inishshark, has been very fully dealt with by Lady Wilde, to whose work I must refer the reader. These notes, however, are new. Omens and death-warnings, such as the banshee, the death-watch, and as mentioned previously (p. 352), the giving of wood out of a house to make a coffin foretelling the death of the giver, are fully believed in. 609 115 121

Luck.—The sight of a red-haired woman or a cat, on starting out in the morning, will bring bad luck to the fishing; and it is stated that people have resorted to the expedient of getting a red-haired girl to lie in wait for a rival, and cross his path as he was starting. 777

To remove from one house to another is also looked upon as decidedly unlucky; but should a move become necessary, it is always made on Monday to the eastward, and on Tuesday to the westward, according to the Irish saying *Luan Soir, agus Mart Siar* (Monday, eastward, and Tuesday, westward). Should any addition be made to the dwelling it is always to the east, never to the west.

It is extremely unlucky to break a looking-glass; so also it is to mention a priest, or a fox, or a hare while fishing.

No man will buy a cow at the New Year without putting some of her milk into his boots, as otherwise she would certainly run dry.

People born on Whit Sunday are thought to be exceptionally ill-tempered.

The evil-eye, also, is strongly believed in; and if any one praises either a child or a beast belonging to a native without saying "God

10: Browne D-5 (1893) 1894
ER6 Rural Irish ER6
Inishbofin

The spinning-wheel and hand-loom are the same as those commonly used on the west coast, the former, as usual, having no treadle. 172 [283]

Querns are still in use, and in connection with them the boran, or sieve of sheepskin stretched over a wicker frame, used for screening the meal. [252] [412]

Grain is still winnowed by shaking it in a sieve in a strong wind. [243]

The method of washing clothes is the same as that customary in Connemara, the clothes being folded, laid in the water of a lake or pool, and beaten with a club or paddle. [296]

The tailor, when making clothes, does not measure his customers with a tape, but takes all his measurements on one sheet of paper, marking the lengths by cutting notches out of the edge. [294]

The curraghs, which are still in use, are of the usual form; they are rapidly going out of fashion, however. [501]

The anchor used for small boats is a stone, not fixed in a wooden clamp, as in Clare and Aran, but having a groove around it for the rope.

As mentioned previously, the apparatus used for the shark-fishing is very rude and primitive.

2. *Antiquities.*— Inishbofin is not very rich in architectural antiquities, and the few that still remain are being rapidly destroyed; some ruins which were standing in the first half of the present century have altogether disappeared, and the others are much shattered. 172

In Inishshark, also, the buildings have sustained a great injury.

It does not lie within my province to enter upon any detailed description of the ruins; but I desire, in the following notes (extracted almost *verbatim* from my Field Note-book), to direct the attention of archæologists to the buildings of interest in these islands which are being rapidly blotted out of existence. The number and nature of these have been described by the late Mr. O'Donovan, Mr. Hardiman, Mr. G. H. Kinahan, and others.

In the account of their present condition given below, they are arranged in the order in which they are described by Mr. Hardiman.[1]

Inishbofin.—(1). St. Colman's church, in Knock townland, built in A.D. 667, is in a very ruinous state, and the interior is filled with rough gravestones and weeds, and in a small recess near the east window is a pile of crania and broken bones. In the enclosure around the church the foundations of the cells (cloghans (?)) of the abbey, or monastic colony, may still be traced, though with difficulty, but the

[1] "H-Iar Connaught," p. 116, footnote.

11: Browne D-5 (1894) 1895
ER6 Rural Irish ER6
Kilmore

114 141 It has been stated by one or two casual visitors that the natives of Inishkea were dwarfed and very degenerate, but this idea seems to have arisen from the islands having been visited at a time when most of the able-bodied men were away at the lobster-fishery, and only the immature, the old, and the ailing were at home. No man of less than 1640 m.m. (5 ft. 4½ in.) was met with on either island, and the men appear to be robust and athletic, while the women are, on the whole, good looking.

143 582 The people themselves do not seem to ascribe any ill effects to the close intermarriage. It is doubtful if these unions are proportionally more frequent in Inishkea than on the mainland.

164 *Diseases.*—The following account is believed to be correct, though, as before stated, there was much difficulty in obtaining accurate information on this subject. Actual figures are given wherever they could be obtained.

The principal diseases may be classed as follows :—

[158] *Insanity.*—A considerable number of cases occur in Erris, mainly in the mountainous districts, comparatively few in the Mullet, and, all informants agreed in stating, that there have been none for many years from either north or south Inishkea.

[273] The prevalence of insanity in the mountainous regions may probably be partly due to illicit distillation, and the influences of worse food and inferior dwellings compared to those of the people of the coast.

732 164 *Idiocy and Imbecility.*—Repeated inquiries failed to find more than two imbeciles, one on south Inishkea, and the other in Belmullet. Two members of the family in the south Inishkea case are lame; no history could be obtained relative to the parents.

Epilepsy is not very common, but several cases (number not ascertained) are known; none of these are in the islands.

Deaf-mutism.—There is one case of deaf-mutism in Belmullet. Parents were said not to be related. No cases in the peninsula or on the islands.

[501] *Blindness*, except among the aged, is not common. A congenitally blind boy was drowned in the year 1893, trying to cross in a curragh from one of the islands to the mainland with a cargo of poteen.

Malformations seem to be rare, two cases of hare lip were the only ones seen, and the inquiry failed to find any more except the two cases of lameness mentioned above.

164 *Fevers.*—Enteric and typhus are both common, cases of the latter being of frequent occurence. Measles and scarlet fever are not very often met with.

11: Browne D-5 (1894) 1895
ER6 Rural Irish ER6
Kilmore

populated country, the district under consideration is practically isolated, and communication with other parts of the country is carried on by road or by sea. Mails and passengers are carried daily to and from Ballina and Belmullet by a good two-horse (Bianconi) stage-car; and a similar vehicle, an opposition venture, also makes the journey daily with passengers and light goods. The country beyond Belmullet is provided with mails twice weekly. Goods are conveyed by carts from Ballina, a distance of over forty miles, during the winter and spring, and large sailing boats are sometimes employed carrying heavy goods from Westport. But few wheeled-vehicles are used except by the better-to-do, and in the remoter parts hardly any are employed, turf, sea-weed, &c., being carried in cleaves or pardoges (panniers with movable bottoms, slung over the backs of horses or donkeys). The people, if poor, have to walk; those better off may ride to market. It is common for two to ride the one horse, a man in the saddle and a woman *en croupe*, or both equestrians may be women, in which case, sometimes, but very rarely, the woman in front may ride astride.

The main roads are pretty good, but many of the smaller ones are very little used, except at harvest time or when turf is being got in, and as a result are grass-grown and uneven. Some small fishing hamlets and outlying places are still unprovided with roads.

For water transport there are the sailing boats before mentioned, used for the conveyance of goods from Westport. The form of boat most in use is the curragh, which is manned by three men; it varies somewhat in pattern in different localities.

In the Mullet and the islands 142 curraghs are in use. Very few boats of other patterns are kept, as there are only three second-class boats (yawls), and about thirty third-class. At Portacloy there are about 30 curraghs.

The southern part of the peninsula and the islands obtain their turf supply by boat from Achill and Ballycroy.

V.—FOLK-LORE.

Although poor in so many other respects, Erris is particularly rich in folk-lore, many old customs, traditions, and beliefs, which have died out, or are dying elsewhere, still flourishing there. The legends and tales of the past and many old songs are still current, especially among the older people, who, however, will not readily communicate them to strangers, so that only a resident well acquainted with Irish

11: Browne D-5 (1894) 1895
ER6 Rural Irish ER6
Kilmore

178 [412] grinding barley for cattle food, or in some few cases for malt for *poteen*.

[415] Hooped piggins are used in many houses, as also are sheepskin sieves (*borans*).

178 283 The spinning-wheel for wool is of the usual Connaught type, without treadle, and is made in the district. The cards used for the wool are imported, being all made in Dublin. The hand-looms are the same as used elsewhere in the West, and of rather rude construction, though capable of turning out good work.

287 A machine of rather primitive design is used for compressing cloth. It was made by its user, and has been working for many years.

373 Rush-lights are used in some houses, and in others the rude lamp already referred to, which is evidently merely a reproduction in tinware of the old stone or iron lamp for fish oil.

273 The stills employed by the makers of poteen are constructed of tin, and of simple but effective design. They are made in the owners houses by tinkers.

501 The curragh, of the usual form, is the boat most in use, and seems likely to hold its own. It is now covered with tarred canvas, but seventy years ago horse-skins were used for this purpose. A large stone is often used as an anchor for small boats.

172 2. *Antiquities* may be divided into two classes—(*a*) Architectural remains, and (*b*) Articles of use or ornament. (*a*) Architectural remains are still very numerous, though many of the most interesting have altogether disappeared; of these the most noticeable was the *Oileach*, the fortified seat of the chiefs of Hy-Fiachrach, which was situated at Elly in the Mullet, on or near the position of Bingham's Castle. Several castles belonging to the Barrets and Burkes have also been entirely destroyed.

Some of the ruins still remaining are of pagan origin, others are ecclesiastical structures. The principal pagan antiquities are the duns or forts, both stone and earthen, the monuments, &c. There are several duns, both within the district actually treated of in this Paper, and along the coast line of the surrounding country; those within the Mullet are *Dunnamoe*, a stone fort of large size, built on a rocky promontory overhanging the sea, and formerly one of the most perfect on this coast; of late years, however, it has suffered severely, the greater part of the wall has been broken down to afford building material for houses and walls about Belmullet; the guard-chambers mentioned by O'Donovan and others are now almost destroyed, the outworks thrown down. One part of the wall alone

13:Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1957
ER6 Rural Irish ER6

PLATE 12

501

1. Curraghs, the Aran Islands.

246
492
342

2. Dragging home the hay in the west of Ireland.

[Facing p. 161]

13:Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1957
ER6 Rural Irish ER6

minutely fragmented appearance of land held in rundale. Rights of access, by narrow lanes between the beds, were often disputed, and there were occasions for fights when as many as a hundred carts from forty townlands might converge on Mill Bay at low tide. I first heard of the seaweed beds from an Air Force pilot who brought me air photographs of what he thought was submerged farmland: the little rectangular fields of Mourne seemed to march out beneath the sea.[1] In fact they were necessary adjuncts to the arable land, and the rents of up to twenty pounds an acre were often higher than those paid for the fields of coarse sand and gravel which the wrack enriched. An auctioneer told me he had sold a wrackbed of one Irish acre for £145 not many years ago. Nearly all of the several hundred farmers who had wrack rights here held two or three beds, and each man's plans were scattered so that he had different kinds of weed growing on them: 'knob wrack' close inshore, then 'bladder wrack' and farther out still the 'lazy wrack' whose fronds are submerged at high water even at neaps and which therefore grows faster than the other species.

The crop was harvested with knives and sickles between March and June, the bare-footed reapers at the same time lifting, turning and re-setting the heavy boulders which tend to get buried in the sand. Carts too are liable to sink, and when the going is too soft the weed is rafted ashore. It is allowed to float on the incoming tide and a boat dragging a rope pulls the load together and tows it ashore. Very large rafts, secured by a rope of seaweed, used to be floated ashore on the tide in Mayo. Patrick Knight, describing Ballycroy about 1830, observed that the steersman, armed with a pole, might be seen 'sitting on the heap, roasting his potatoes and shellfish'.[2]

The great bulk of the wrack taken all round the coast for manure was driftweed thrown up during storms, but the supply was often supplemented by cutting or pulling weed from the rocks, and in some places there were complicated methods of regulating and distributing the harvest. On a stretch of coast familiar to me in south Down one can pick out strips running out into the sea, demarcated by marked boulders. They were

[1] E. E. Evans, *Mourne Country*, ch. 15.
[2] P. Knight, *Erris in the Irish Highlands*, 99.

13:Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1957
ER6 Rural Irish ER6

XVII

BOATS AND FISHING

THE lower reaches of the River Boyne, celebrated among archaeologists as the setting of one of the most remarkable groups of chamber tombs in western Europe, have another claim on our interests as the last refuge of a venerable craft. This is perhaps the only place in Europe where the phrase 'the skin of a boat' preserves its literal meaning. The lath or wicker-work coracle is known on several of the Welsh rivers, but only in the Boyne curragh (Ir. *currach*) is the covering still made of hide. The ox-hides now used are imported: the one I examined during a recent visit to the salmon fisheries near Drogheda had been tanned by a specialist in the dressing of beaver skins. Each hide may outlast several 'baskets' or boat-frames, for these quickly rot with repeated wettings and dryings, and on the average two frames of doubled hazel wands are required each season, which lasts from 12th February to 12th August. A few other Irish rivers kept their curraghs into recent centuries—the curragh was certainly known on the Shannon and the Erne and possibly on the Bann—but on most of the inland waters dug-outs seem to have been traditional, and if we knew more about the two distributions important cultural inferences might be drawn. Dug-outs have been found, however, in nearly every part of the country, including the River Boyne.

The curragh is not likely to survive much longer and its lore should be fully recorded. Netting salmon in fresh water on all Irish rivers has been illegal since 1st January 1948, so that the curragh's last legal refuge is the tidal portion of the Boyne. But it has been long a-dying. I was told that no more would be made after the death of that fine craftsman Michael O'Brien

13:Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1957
ER6 Rural Irish ER6

some twenty years ago, but it was not so. I find that W. F. Wakeman was informed that the two curraghs which he sketched on the Boyne in 1848 were 'probably the last which would be constructed for use on those waters'.[1]

Fortunately James Hornell has published a careful study of *British Coracles and Irish Curraghs*,[2] and the following account is based on his book, supplemented by personal observation. On the level sward—his rustic shipyard—the boat-builder first marks out, with string and pegs, two semicircles of 2 ft. radius, their centres being about twenty inches apart. This will give the basket a mouth measuring 6 ft. by 4 ft., a size determined by the average size of a hide. Joining the two circles into an ellipse, he thrusts into the ground along this line, at intervals of about nine inches, long pointed hazel rods which have been cut the previous autumn after the leaf-fall and allowed to season (Fig. 77). They are pushed about six inches into the ground, at an angle so that they slope outwards somewhat. At one end, the bow-to-be, an extra rod is inserted on either side to give strength where the weight of the kneeling paddleman will fall. Against the ground a strong gunwale of withies is woven on to the rods, and above it a skirting of lighter withies. Opposite rods on each side are now bent over and their thin ends pushed into the ground to secure them temporarily. The fore-and-aft rods are similarly bent over and heavy stones placed on the basket, their weight distributed so as to make a symmetrical frame with the top (that is the bottom of the curragh) as nearly flat as possible. At this stage two or three days are allowed for the frame to set. Then the crossings of the rods are lashed with a continuous twine and again the frame is left weighted. The thin ends of the rods are now broken off at the last lashings in such a way as to leave the bark projecting to prevent the ends from damaging the hide. This, which has meanwhile been softening in the river, is sewn on to the gunwale with twine, the basket having been pulled out of the ground and inverted. The thwart is fixed in position amidship, its ends suspended from the gunwale with withy ties, and withy braces are laced across the stern portion to form a rest for the

[1] W. F. Wakeman, *J.R.S.A.I.* (1878), 76.
[2] J. Hornell, *British Coracles and Irish Curraghs* (1938).

[Text continues on p. 236]

13:Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1957
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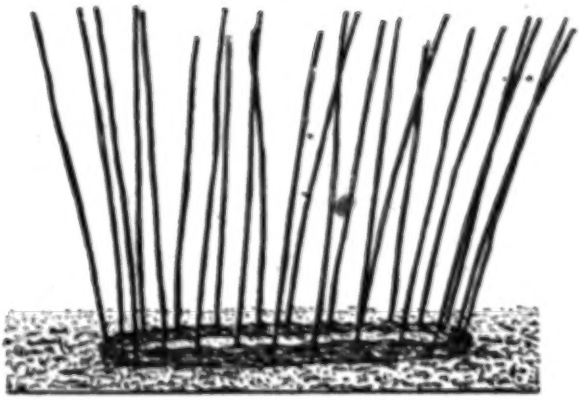

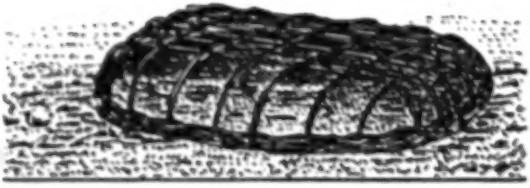

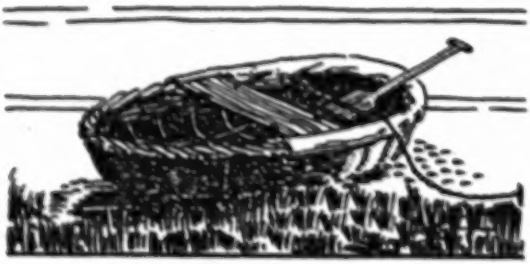

FIG. 77. The Boyne curragh: construction of basket.

13:Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1957
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net. Sitting on the thwart, the boat-builder now drives in the projecting rod-ends to tighten the skin, and trims them to within an inch of the gunwale. Finally he weaves on a protecting mouth of hazel rods which he binds to the gunwale and covers, behind the thwart, with canvas to save the net from damage as it is played out.

The curragh was well adapted to the draft-net salmon fishery at the Oldbridge weir on the Boyne. The following account is based on notes made at Oldbridge in 1947: 'Every half hour of daylight during the season, the curragh makes its brief trip with a draft-net around the pool of water where the salmon lie below the weir. Its virtue lies in its lightness and ease of handling—though not for the novice—in the method of paddling over the bows which allows it to keep close to the banks, and especially in the shallow draught which enables it to pass right under the weir without being swept down by the under-current. The paddler kneels in the deep bows and draws the boat along with rapid strokes alternately to left and right. The net-man sits on the thwart facing backwards and plays out the net, the end of which is held by a third man on the bank. Having reached the far end of the weir the paddler races downstream and returns across the current to join the third man and close the net. The salmon are dispatched with a heavy 'priest' here called the killing-stick.' The fishermen still operate two rectangular fishtraps below the weir, one near each bank, composed of iron gratings which have probably replaced wicker traps since they are known as 'hurdles'. The salmon are taken out with a landing net. A weir has probably been worked continuously at this spot since the Middle Ages, for the monks of Mellifont Abbey operated a weir here.[1]

It comes as a shock, after seeing the little basket-curragh of the Boyne, to recall that the legendary histories tell of much trafficking across the seas in splendid curraghs which carried sails. *The Voyage of Teigue* was made in a curragh constructed of forty oxhides and fitted with twenty-five thwarts.[2] Allowance must be made for picturesque exaggeration, but there is no doubt that the monks of the Irish Church went far afield in

[1] A. E. J. Went, *Co. Louth Arch. Journ.*, 13 (1953), 18–33.
[2] Standish O'Grady, *Silva Gadelica* (1892), 586.

13:Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1957
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their skin boats and almost certainly reached Iceland before the Norsemen. An account of the legendary voyagings of St. Brendan speaks of the hides of his curragh as dressed with butter. Port-na-Curaich, on the island of Iona, commemorates the landing of another Irish saint, St. Columba, though one hesitates to accept the tradition that the long mound which may be seen there is the place where he buried his curragh so that he could not return to Ireland. The sea-going curraghs were ideal craft for the Irish raiders who plundered west Britain during and after the Roman occupation: light in weight, of shallow draught and capable of flying over the waves. Probably the plank-built longboats of the Vikings drove the curraghs from the Irish Sea, but its descendants are still to be found in the rowing curraghs of the west coast from Donegal to Kerry. The Boyne curragh is a fossilized relic of an earlier form, if indeed it is not, as Hornell thought, a degeneration product.

But besides the rowing curraghs up to twenty-five feet in length there are also, in Donegal, smaller paddling curraghs eight or ten feet long which seem to stand between the oval river baskets and the sharp-pointed rowing curraghs. In an account of the Rosses in the 1750s we read of the funeral processions to the island of Aranmore in Donegal which comprised as many as sixty or eighty curraghs covered with seal skins.[1] We learn from a description of their construction written nearly 100 years later that the frame of sallies and laths, at that time 'skinned with a hide or tarred canvas' was lashed together with cords of horsehair.[2] The same writer tells us that cattle were transported in them by lifting an animal into the curragh on its back, with its legs tied, and carrying the loaded vessel into the water. He gives the following example of 'the reckless daring of these islanders. A man and his wife coming out of the island of Aranmore, in a little boat filled with turf, had a horse standing on top of it; with the roll of the sea, the animal was thrown out, and as they were a long way from land, must have been drowned, had not the man cleverly succeeded in getting him into the boat again!' It seems from what records are available that the hides used for covering the vessels,

[1] A. B., *The Rosses in 1753*, 202.
[2] Lord George Hill, *Gweedore*, 31.

13:Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1957
ER6 Rural Irish ER6

501 [281] whether seal-skin or the hide of a cow or horse, were untanned. I can add little to the historical account given by Hornell, but it should be noticed that the paddle curragh, covered with horsehide, was common in Erris, Co. Mayo, around 1850[1] and that, to judge from an entry in a Rathlin Island account book of 1760—'paid for one mare's hide for the boat, 1s. and 6d.'—the paddle curragh was used there also.

501 3% The long rowing curragh with its high pointed nose is widely distributed on the west coast from Donegal to Kerry, and its seaworthy qualities are known to many from its dramatic participation in such films as *Man of Aran* and *Shark Island*. This vessel too is built bottom upwards, but the frame is pegged, not into the ground but into a strong wooden gunwale frame, single or double, which Hornell believes was borrowed, along with the fixed thwarts which give lateral rigidity, from plank-built boats. Yet the method of pivoting the oar on a single tholepin, originally perhaps a strong projecting rib of the curragh frame, rather than in a rowlock, suggests that the rowing curragh has native forerunners. There are many variations in constructional details from one district to another but nearly all the vessels are now built of laths and all are covered with tarred canvas. An emergency repair is contrived by an operation which, if you are a timid passenger, looks like 'burning your boats': the curragh is inverted, the tar around the hole is set alight and a calico patch stuck on when the tar has run. The curraghs are rowed by two, three or four men, and the largest are said to have a carrying capacity of two tons. In Kerry they are masted to carry a small lug sail. A feature of [777] many curraghs is a small bottle of holy water, a protection against misfortune, suspended on a string in the bows.

501 The looms of the long narrow oars overlap so that the oarsman pulls cross-handed. A heavy wooded counterweight, the bool, is attached near the loom, and the oar pivots by means of a round hole in the bool on a single wooden peg, the tholepin, driven into the gunwale (Fig. 78). This method of rowing is found on many lake and river boats in Ireland, perhaps es- [171] pecially in those areas, such as the Shannon and Lough Neagh,

[1] P. Knight, *Erris in the Irish Highlands* (1836), 56. See also *Pococke's Tour* 1752, 64.

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13:Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1957
ER6 Rural Irish ER6

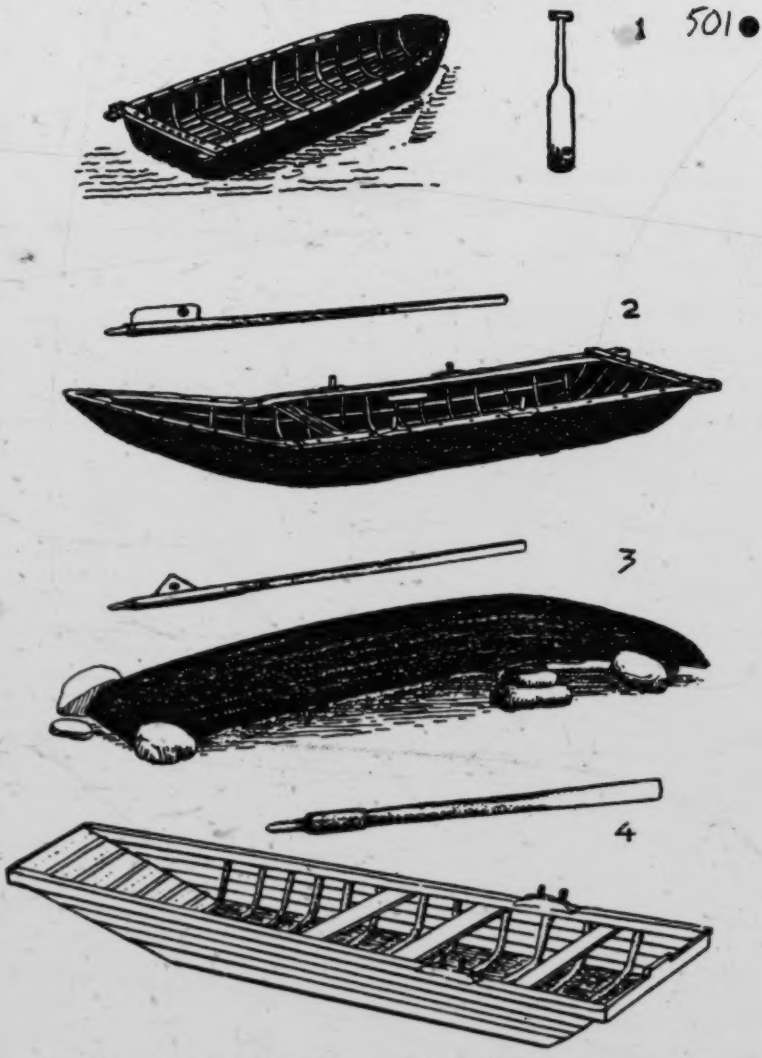

FIG. 78. Curraghs and cot. (1) Paddle curragh and paddle, Bunbeg, Co. Donegal. (2) Rowing curragh and oar, Sheephaven, Co. Donegal. (3) Rowing curragh and oar, Spiddal, Co. Galway. (4) Cot and oar, Lough Erne, Co. Fermanagh.

13:Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1957
ER6 Rural Irish ER6

501 where curraghs were formerly known. But it is also characteristic of Scottish cobles and the boats of some English lakes. 171 The inshore fishing boats of Co. Antrim also had booled oars,[1] and farther afield the single tholepin is said to typify the rowing boats of Madeira, the sardine boats of Portugal and some vessels of the Upper Nile. These often use a grommet, as do the boats of the north-east coast of England.

Sea-going curraghs are put to many uses, for inshore net 226 fishing, for setting lobster pots or long lines, for gathering kelp and for carrying freight, livestock and passengers. But the most spectacular purpose to which they have been put is for hunting the basking shark or sunfish from whose liver, before [373] the advent of paraffin, oil for lighting was obtained. A single fish will yield from seven to ten barrels of liver. Measuring up to forty feet in length, the basking shark is one of the world's largest fish and though harmless—its diet is minute copepods—its bulk makes it a formidable adversary. These fish move down the west coast in summer, and in early May they haunt the Sunfish Bank thirty miles off Achill Island, where they come to the surface in the morning and evening. The bank is remarkable for the break of the tide on it, although it lies between seventy and ninety fathoms near the edge of 'soundings'—the continental shelf—and a heavy swell makes conditions difficult for small boats. Here and elsewhere the sunfish used to be harpooned from curraghs, but the advantage lay with decked vessels which could stand by for several days. In the early nineteenth century as many as thirty or forty fish were sometimes killed on the Sunfish Bank in a single day of fine weather. Nowadays the sharks are taken in strong nets fixed to island headlands around which they swim. They are occasionally seen off the other Irish coasts, where they cause great havoc if they get involved in the fishing nets.

Of the small open clinker-built boats of traditional type which 501 takes the place of the curragh on the north, east and south [174] coasts, no systematic study has been made. Some of them betray their Norse inheritance in their lines or their names, for example the Wicklow skiff and the drontheim (Trondhjem) of the north coast. These boats are double-ended—unlike the cur-

[1] S. McSkimin, *The History and Antiquities of Carrickfergus*, 276.

13:Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1957
ER6 Rural Irish ER6

raghs—and would not be out of place in the fiords. In fact during the nineteenth century, and perhaps from earlier times, many yawls were imported unfinished from Norway, carrying only the bottom (garboard) strakes hollowed from a thick plank. Local materials, always scarce in Ireland in recent centuries, were utilized where possible, holly for the keel (it wears smooth and slides well on beach gravel) ropes of bog fir, and a 'whin root' for the tiller. In Kerry the entire vessel was sometimes built from bog fir: for this purpose as for making roof-frames it had the advantage of impermeability.[1] For off-shore fishing in the Irish Sea the lugger—a name now applied to the motor drifter which has taken its place—developed in the nineteenth century under the influence of visiting 'nickies', the Manx name for Cornish lug-sailed herring boats, said to have been given because so many of their crews were named Nicholas. On the west coast the Galway hookers are now, despite their name, used almost entirely for carrying turf and live-stock. The lug-sailed pookhauns used for fishing are a variant of the Irish Sea yawl, of clumsy construction thanks to limited resources and unsuitable building materials.

On many inland loughs and larger rivers dug-out boats not much different from those of the Bronze Age seem to have continued to be made into the seventeenth century and probably even later in places. The most serious problem to be solved in hollowing out a solid log is how to keep the sides and bottom of the vessel of even thickness. Some of the ancient dug-outs recovered from the Irish lakes and rivers show that their makers had availed themselves of a method which is practised today in parts of Indonesia. The method is to bore holes through the shell and plug the holes with pegs of the right length to serve as gauges. The plugged holes observed in the bottom of many an Irish dug-out have been explained as drainage holes, but the pegs would in that case have been left protruding, and one hole would surely have sufficed. As the country lost its forests it must have become difficult to obtain trees of the right size and kind, especially oak, for boat making, and by the eighteenth century, it seems, plank boats retaining some features of the dug-out were substituted. Around 1800 the salmon-fishing cots

[1] A. Young, *Tour*, 2, 89.

13:Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1957
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of the River Nure were described as 'flat narrow boats equal at both ends and propelled by paddles'.[1] Earlier, about 1645, Gerard Boate described the cots as 'things like boats, but very unshapely, being nothing but square pieces of timber made hollow.' 'They are very common throughout all Ireland . . . even upon the great rivers and loughs'.[2]

To judge from the numerous discoveries of small dug-outs at river crossings their last surviving use was for ferrying purposes. They were replaced locally by flat-bottomed cots built with wide planks laid edge to edge, such as serve the eel-fishers of the River Bann. These are propelled with a pole. The punt-like cot is also the old craft of the River Shannon. A number of dug-outs are found to have been adapted for propulsion with oars, using the single thole-pin of the rowing-curragh. The large rowing boats of Lough Neagh also use the single thole-pin: to give greater leverage for the heavy oars the iron thole-pin is set out from the gunwale on an outrigger or 'bolster'. In the cots of Lough Erne the oar is worked between double thole-pins (Fig. 78). The maze of lakes which make up the Lough Erne group have yielded many ancient dug-outs of varied types, some of them spoon-shaped, others rectangular and provided with carrying lugs. Others again seem to be both boat and sledge, an alternative to the portable curragh in a land strewn with little lakes. But the strangest vessel, apparently misnamed a curragh, was a kind of raft which is said to have survived until a hundred years ago, 'composed of wreaths of bull-rushes tied upon a frame or raft made of rough branches of trees'.[3]

Methods of fishing in river and lake include not only legitimate forms of angling and netting, but many ways of killing fish which game laws and other vested interests have made illegal, but have not extinguished. The spearing of salmon, prohibited since 1714, is now left to poachers, but well into the last century it was openly practised in the city of Galway.[4] On Lough Neagh yellow (feeding) eels are caught illicitly on long lines by fisherfolk whose claims to ancient rights have not been recognized by the courts.

[1]W. Tighe, *Statistical Observations, County of Kilkenny*, 150.
[2]G. Boate, *Ireland's Natural History*, 64, 136.
[3]W. F. Wakeman, loc. cit.
[4]A. E. J. Went, *J.R.S.A.I.*, 82 (1952), 110

13:Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1957
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and are therefore known as 'harvest herrings'. It is then that the yawls or skiffs which lie half hidden for most of the year have their brief spell of activity, and the farmers who jointly own them find on moonlight nights a cool relief from the hot pressure of harvest. The fish are caught in trammel nets, and they were formerly in great demand not only locally but for many miles inland for salting down as winter 'kitchen'.[1] A more varied diet has lessened the demand, for the great days of the salt herring were the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries when a potato diet cried out for a tasty accompaniment. On the north-west coast the herring fishery extends through the winter, with consequent serious risks which the Donegal men have none the less been willing to take. Here, perhaps, is one explanation for the survival of the light rowing curragh down to the coming of powered vessels, for a small sail boat brings many hazards on this stormy Atlantic coast.

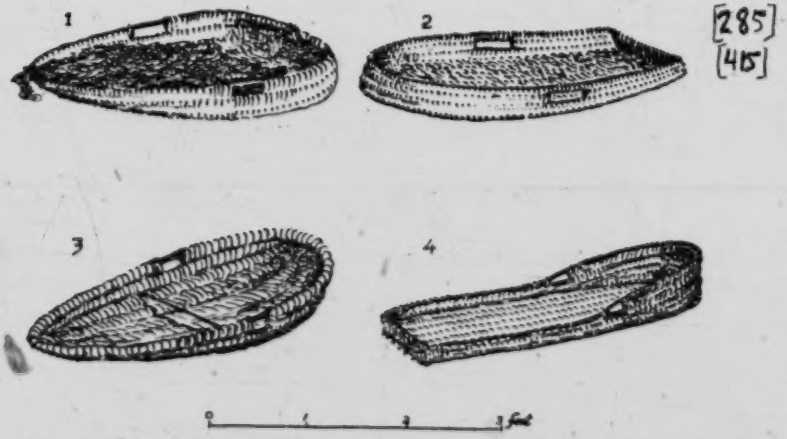

FIG. 82. Long-line baskets. (1) Co. Antrim. (2) Co. Galway. (3) Co. Down. (4) Aran Islands.

Long line fishing for cod, skate, ling and other big fish is almost certainly far older than the herring fishery, and it has preserved down to our own day many ancient practices and

[1] E. E. Evans, *Mourne Country*, ch. 18.

16:Messenger E-4,5 (1955-1966) 1969 ER6 Rural Irish ER6
(1959-1960) Inis Beag

Introduction

101 131 105 178 [162] INIS BEAG is a fictitious name for one of the many inhabited islands of the Irish Gaeltacht.[1] It is a rocky, barren protuberance in the ocean, buffeted constantly by wind and storm, where 350 hardy people eke out a meager existence. This tiny island is renowned not only for the distinctive folk culture possessed by its inhabitants, but for its numerous, well-preserved antiquities which attest to at least 5000 years of almost continuous human habitation, and its great beauty of land and seascape. During the past 150 years, first scientists, then writers, and more recently film, radio, and television producers have visited Inis Beag, and their many works have served to familiarize the world with the culture, albeit romanticized, of the islanders. As a result of literary publicity, which commenced in the first [241] [244] decade of this century, increasing numbers of tourists have been drawn to Inis Beag over the years. The cultural forms which are most publicized and attract the most [501] attention from tourists are the traditional garb of the folk, their skill in rowing [197] the famed canoe, called *curach*, the manner in which they manufacture soils and grow in them a variety of crops, and their Gaelic speech.

114 121 127 My wife and I were introduced to Inis Beag during a short visit to Ireland in 1955, when we viewed the island from the nearby coast and talked of its cultural past and present with scholars in Dublin, Cork, and Galway. Between 1955 and 1958, we immersed ourselves in writings pertaining to Irish history and culture, and during the three summer months of the latter year we visited several peasant communities on the mainland and three islands, including Inis Beag, of the Gaeltacht. We made plans to come back to Inis Beag as soon as possible to undertake research, and in 1959 and 1960 we were able to spend the greater part of a year there, during which time we visited briefly on three occasions a neighboring island—Inis Thiar[2]—and several institutions on the mainland to conduct library and other research. We returned eight times to Inis Beag and Dublin for

131 197 142 103 192

[1] The Gaeltacht—areas in which 25 to 100 percent of the inhabitants speak Irish—embraces portions of 12 northern, western, and southern counties and a population of approximately 600,000 people (Freeman 1960:166).

[2] In Gaelic, Inis Thiar (also a fictitious name) means Western Isle, and Inis Beag is translated Little Isle.

16:Messenger E-4,5 (1955-1966) 1969 ER6 Rural Irish ER6
(1959-1960) Inis Beag

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• 501
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Figure 9. Launching a curach *from the strand in stormy weather*

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177 they taken fish which eventually would have found their way into island nets, but
178 they have destroyed with their trawls spawning beds of certain fish and captured
[648] lines and nets set out many miles in the ocean by Inis Beag crews. Another reason
[133] why fish have become scarce is that shifting currents or other related factors have caused some fish, especially mackerel, to bypass the region. Other coastal areas of Ireland from which fish seldom were taken in quantity in the past now are thriving, and some islanders look hopefully to the future when once again migra-
[132] tory routes will change and bring the fish back. However, even if fish were more
[601] available today, it would be difficult to fish for them from *curach* for part of the year because of worsening weather conditions. Storms have increased in number and severity during the winters, and even the summers which once were relatively "calm" are punctuated with long spells of "rough" weather which makes going out in the canoes risky (see Fig. 9). Finally, a seldom admitted factor also must be
[829] considered—the indolence of the men. Aged fishermen assert that sufficient fish are still available to make serious fishing a highly profitable occupation, but that young men have been "spoiled" by government benevolence and are unwilling to undergo the hardships entailed—"Why rise before dawn and row all day when you can draw the dole?" During 1959, those crews which fished the most averaged between 50 and 60 pounds per man for the season.

654 Whereas the efforts of the Irish Free State and the Republic to improve
228 Inis Beag living standards have been directed mostly toward stimulating agriculture and animal husbandry, those of the government before 1922 were focused on making fishing a more productive enterprise. The Congested Districts Board intro-

16:Messenger E-4,5 (1955-1966) 1969 ER6 Rural Irish ER6
(1959-1960) Inis Beag

duced trawlers and other types of fishing vessels and financed their purchase by islanders of the region, sent instructors to teach fishermen how to use the new boats and gear, set up curing and storage facilities in the islands, facilitated the shipping of fish to mainland markets, and attempted to regulate these markets so as to ensure maximum profits for the folk. These efforts failed for the most part in Inis Beag, and today the men fish from *curach*, much as did their grandfathers. The continuing effort of the government to improve fishing in the area is reflected in instruction in modern fishing techniques at a school in a nearby island, and the successful operation of a number of government financed trawlers and other fishing boats from there.

The islanders consider fish from the sea, which are netted, more palatable and healthier to eat than those caught with lines and trawls, fresh water fish, and fish which have been cured or frozen. Fish taken on lines, because they bleed, and those enmeshed in trawls, because they suffocate, are thought to suffer in taste and nourishment, as do those which are treated artificially for sale; and fresh water fish are believed to be unhealthy to eat because they feed on refuse thrown into lakes and rivers rather than on natural foods. Some folk exclude even mackerel from their diet, since these fish "swim on the surface and eat everything dirty afloat." We already have noted that Inis Beag elders prefer seaweed to chemical fertilizers; the preference for netted fish which feed on natural foods to fresh water fish and mackerel which are contaminated is another example of a recurrent cultural theme—the positive valuation of natural objects and the negative valuation of artificial ones which come in contact with the human body. Other manifestations of this theme are the emphasis placed on folk medicines and the distrust of medicines prescribed by nurse and doctor, the belief that certain foods will assure health and combat specific illnesses, and the fear of piped water and canned foods. I often was told that I could improve my eyesight by giving up my glasses and rubbing dew on my eyelids, or by walking along the seashore to allow the wind and spray to penetrate my eyeballs.

Over 30 varieties of fish are caught off Inis Beag, some with lines of varying length and number of hooks, others in the four types of nets, and a few with both lines and nets. Most important of the fish are: ling, cod, bream, gurnet, haddock, and autumn mackerel caught with lines; plaice, turbot, rock fish, and pollack both netted and taken on lines; and herring and spring mackerel captured in special nets. Trammel and drag nets are used in addition to herring and mackerel nets, and the most commonly used baits are gurnet, haddock, conger eel, bream, herring, and limpets. Fishing techniques vary considerably, as do the times of the year when particular kinds of fish are available, the localities that they frequent, and the baits which are most effective for each variety. Fishing crews form at different times of the year, often to fish in certain areas for specific fish. They are composed of both kin and close friends, and they tend to alter in membership from year to year as other activities intrude.

Before I leave the subject of fishing, I wish to correct three commonly held misconceptions concerning Inis Beag men: they are all skilled seamen; because they spend much of their time at sea they are of necessity able swimmers; and

16:Messenger E-4,5 (1955-1966) 1969 ER6 Rural Irish ER6
(1959-1960) Inis Beag

underclothing retained. The latter practice reflects extreme modesty as well as the need for warmth. Islanders have an obsessive fear of nakedness which permits them, after infancy, to bathe only their feet, hands, and face and precludes bathing in the sea and the use of bathtubs.

Crafts

Of the several crafts practiced in Inis Beag, only three are strictly income instead of combined subsistence-income activities: the manufacture of *curach* by four men, the mass production of stockings by four girls in the factory at the coast guard station, and the fashioning of miniature canoes by a single man. Sweaters, woven belts, cowhide shoes, and the small multi-colored shawls are made both for local wear and for export. Most of the exported sweaters are sold to a particular mainland firm for resale, as are all of the model canoes, and the factory is sponsored by Gaeltacht Eireann which markets the stockings produced. Other craft commodities are sold by the folk directly to consumers, most of whom are tourists.

The long rowing canoe of Inis Beag is distributed widely along the west coast of Ireland, from Cos. Donegal to Kerry, and its seaworthy qualities as well as the rowing skill of the crews which sail it are renowned. One of a number of varieties of the coracle, which has a heritage extending back to the Mesolithic, it is built of deal and oak lathes and covered with tarred canvas (see Fig 10). Before canvas was introduced, untanned seal, cow, and horse hides were used for covering, and these were reported from a nearby island less than 100 years ago. The *curach* is approximately 20 feet in length, has a high pointed nose, is round bellied and lacks a keel, draws less than 6 inches of water, and is rowed with narrow 10-feet-long oars. These oars are bladeless for use in rough seas and are pivoted on single tholepins rather than in oarlocks. The looms of the oars overlap, so that oarsmen must pull cross-handed, and on long journeys a lug sail is hoisted to relieve the crew. For the neophyte, rowing a *curach* cross-handed in a heavy sea can be even more abusive of the hands than rebuilding a gateway in a stone fence. Most canoes hold three men—are "three-oared"—but two-, four-, and even five-men *curach* were or are used. Loads up to a ton and a half can be accommodated, and trussed asses, sheep, and horses sometimes are transported in them.

Forty-two householders in Inis Beag own three-men canoes, among whom three have additional two-oared *curach*. The craft are stored upside down in "cots" on either side of the strand along the margins of the common land, although Terrao villagers use a small beach along the northeast coast of the island; they are carried between the cots and the water upside down on the shoulders of the crew, and in that position resemble gigantic beetles. Two Inis Beag men are at work building canoes most of the time, and when they are not busy at this task they construct furniture for local sale. Two other men manufacture *curach* occasionally, and another two who once built them have discontinued the practice. No canoe makers are found elsewhere in the region; therefore, Inis Beag artisans serve the

16:Messenger E-4,5 (1955-1966) 1969 ER6 Rural Irish ER6
(1959-1960) Inis Beag

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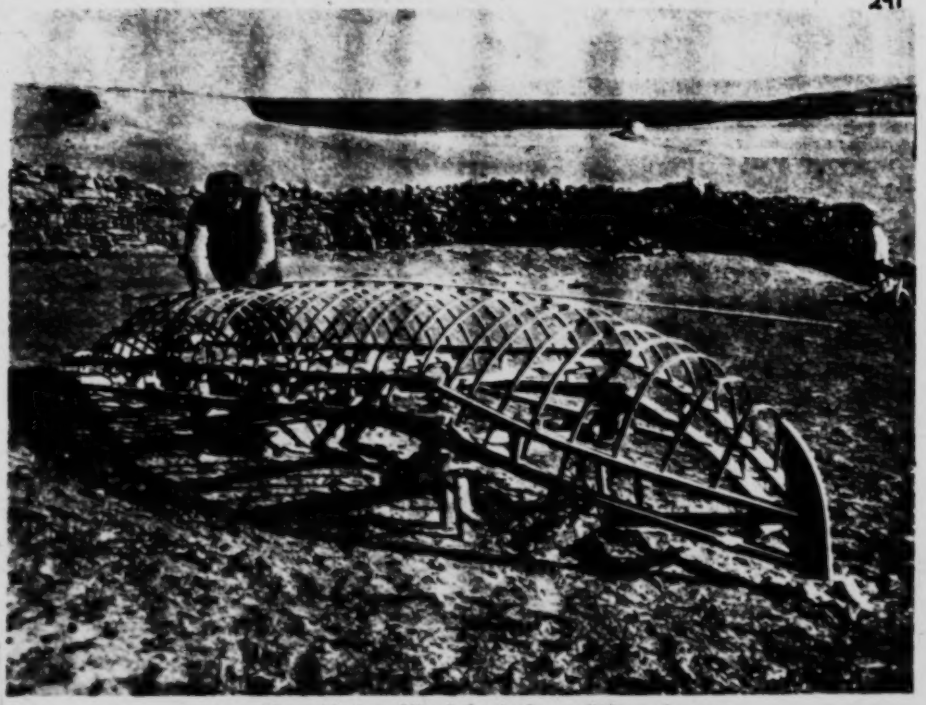

Figure 10. Assembling lathes in the construction of a canoe

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folk of neighboring islands as well as mainland seamen for many miles around. A *curach* takes a week of steady work to construct, and the builder is paid 6 pounds for his labor and a shopkeeper 12 pounds for the materials.

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The curate blesses a newly manufactured canoe, and a small bottle of holy water is kept in its bow to afford the crew magical protection. Some fishermen seek further spiritual assistance by tipping their caps and making the sign of the cross with salt water before shoving off, especially if they are about to encounter hazardous weather conditions or are to make a long voyage. One of the many omens known to the folk is a "prayer to guide you safely," passed down from the time of St. Patrick, it is claimed, which is uttered by fishermen ready to put out to sea; if two mistakes are made in its recitation, danger is in the offing and the trip is postponed or cancelled. Another sign of impending peril which will cause postponement of a fishing trip is for one of the crew to meet a red-haired woman on the trail as he walks to the strand to embark.

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The knit sweater, called a "ganzie," is not a traditional item of wear, as is

Sex and Repression in an Irish Folk Community

Many kinds of behavior disassociated from sex in other societies such as nudity and physiological evacuation, are considered sexual in Inis Beag. Nudity is abhorred by the islanders, and the consequences of this attitude are numerous and significant for health and survival. Only infants have their entire bodies sponged once a week, on Saturday night; children, adolescents, and adults, on the same night, wash only their faces, necks, lower arms, hands, lower legs, and feet. Several times my wife and I created intense embarrassment by entering a room in which a man had just finished his weekly ablutions and was barefooted; once when this occurred, the man hurriedly pulled on his stockings and said with obvious relief, "Sure, it's good to get your clothes on again." Clothing always is changed in private, sometimes within the secrecy of the bedcovers, and it is usual for the islanders to sleep in their underclothes.

Despite the fact that Inis Beag men spend much of their time at sea in their canoes, as far as we could determine none of them can swim. Four rationales are given for this deficiency: the men are confident that nothing will happen to them, because they are excellent seamen and weather forecasters; a man who cannot swim will be more careful; it is best to drown immediately when a canoe capsizes far out in the ocean rather than swim futilely for minutes or even hours, thus prolonging the agony; and, finally, "When death is on a man, he can't be saved." The truth of the matter is that they have never dared to bare their bodies in order to learn the skill. Some women claim to have "bathed" at the back of the island during the heat of summer, but this means wading in small pools with skirts held knee-high, in complete privacy. Even the nudity of household pets can arouse anxiety, particularly when they are sexually aroused during time of heat. In some homes, dogs are whipped for licking their genitals and soon learn to indulge in this practice outdoors. My wife, who can perform Irish step-dances and sing many of the popular folk songs, was once requested to sing a seldom-heard American Western ballad; she chose "The Lavendar Cowboy," who "had only two hairs on his chest." The audience response was perfunctory and, needless to say, she never again was "called out" to sing that particular song.

The drowning of seamen, who might have saved themselves had they been able to swim, is not the only result of the sexual symbolism of nudity; men who were unwilling to face the nurse when ill, because it might have meant baring their bodies to her, were beyond help when finally treated. While my wife and I were on the island, a nurse was assaulted by the mother of a young man for diagnosing his illness and